

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination FormSee instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For NPS use only

received

date entered

1. Name

historic St. Mary's Church

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number 800 North Fifth St. N/A not for publication

city, town Kansas City N/A vicinity of ~~Congressional District~~

state Kansas code 20 county Wyandotte code 209

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: vacant

4. Owner of Property

name Ignatius J. Strecker, Archbishop--Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas

street & number 2220 Central Avenue Post Office Box 2328

city, town Kansas City N/A vicinity of state Kansas 66110

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds

street & number Wyandotte County Courthouse

city, town Kansas City state Kansas

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title None has this property been determined eligible? yes ☒ no

date N/A federal state county local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town N/A state

7. Description

Condition

☒ excellent
☐ good
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☐ unaltered
☒ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved date N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

St. Mary's Church, 800 North Fifth Street, is located on the northwest corner of Fifth Street and Ann Avenue in an ethnic neighborhood in Kansas City, Kansas, called Strawberry Hill. The Romanesque Revival church has a frontage of approximately 73 feet on Fifth Street and 155½ feet on Ann Avenue. The church is a modified cruciform plan. St. Mary's is surrounded primarily by residential structures. To the south of the church and across the street is the parish school. There is a small parking lot to the north and west of the church.

The church is constructed of gray limestone, quarried at Strong City, Kansas. The exterior front doors are made of oak. The windows in the church are stained glass but are currently boarded over. The foundation of the entire structure is coursed stone, and a stone string course runs unbroken around the entire building just above the basement level. The cornices on the front facade between the towers and on the transept pediments are carved from stone. All of the round-arched doors and windows are capped by prominent stone voussoirs.

The church roofs are medium-pitched gables covered with asbestos shingles. The bell tower has a pyramidal roof also covered with asbestos shingles. The three-story tower at the northeast corner of the church has a flat roof covered with tar and gravel. There is one brick exterior chimney located on the west facade.

The east facade, facing Fifth Street, is the main facade. It consists of a central entrance bay recessed between two towers. The main door in the recessed portion of the facade is flanked by two smaller doors. The transoms of all three doors contain stained glass, but these have been boarded over. The voussoirs and quoins of the main entrance are dressed. The extrados of the large central arch is foliated at its spring point. The Sacred Heart ornaments the keystone. The main entrance is a double ten panel wooden door. The side entrances are single seven panel wooden doors. Stairs run the length of this bay, giving access to all three doors.

The second story has windows located above the two side entrances and a niche with a statue of the Virgin Mary above the main door. The statue was carved by Daniel Doody, a local sculptor. Separating the first and second floors is a stone sill-course that continues on around the towers. On the third floor level, above the statue, is a wheel window encircled by dressed stone voussoirs. A stepped stone motif runs below the raking cornice on this section of the facade. A stone cross is located at the peak of the gable.

Located at the south end of the main facade is a four-story bell tower with a pyramidal roof. There is a stone cross at the peak of the roof. Stone sill courses are located beneath the windows of the second, third, and fourth stories. The stained glass windows on the first and second stories have been boarded over. On the third floor of the tower is a single, multi-paned round-arched window. It is set in a

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recessed panel decorated with block modillions. This same motif is repeated on the fourth floor. The windows on the fourth floor, however, are unglazed, that being the location of the bells. A cornerstone with the date of 1890 is located at the southwest corner of the tower.

To the north of the entrance is a three-story tower of essentially the same design as the south tower. This tower, however, has a crenelated roof-line.

The west facade is very plain. The pedimented projecting central bay contains window and door openings which have been boarded up. To the south of the projecting bay is an exterior buff brick chimney.

The north facade is punctuated by large stained glass windows and the projecting transept. The windows are set in recessed panels with block modillions decorating the upper edge. The gable end of the transept holds a large wheel window finished like the one on the front facade. Above the rose window are two small arched windows beneath which runs a stone sill course. Both the arched windows and the rose window are located in a recessed panel. The pediment is finished with stepped stones. Just east of the transept is a single five-panel wooden door. The entrance is protected by a flat aluminum roof supported by metal poles. Concrete steps with wrought iron railings give access to the door. To the west of the transept are paired arched windows on the first and second stories. These windows are also placed in a recessed rectangular panel and the floors distinguished by stone string course. A small wooden-lean-to has been added over the basement entrance located near the eastern end of the facade. Also, the air conditioning units are exposed on this facade.

The south facade is essentially the same as the north, with a few differences. Because of the grade on this side of the church more of the basement level is exposed. A double wooden door, located in the transept, gives access to the basement. The basement windows are paired, one-over-one light, double-hung sash windows.

The plan of the church is a modified cruciform one. Rows of pews are located on either side of a central aisle. Beautiful stained glass windows, designed by J. C. Other and Co. of St. Louis, Missouri (presently the W. F. Other and Sons Unique Art Glass Co., Inc.) adorn the north and south walls of the church, as well as the transoms over the doors at the east end of the church.

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Large wheel windows are located on the north and south walls at the transept. A balcony at the east end of the church houses a new organ. The most outstanding feature of the interior of the church is its elaborately carved altarpieces. There are three altars in all, one large central altar with depiction of the Crucifixion and two side altars with statues of the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph. These altars came from Louisville and are made of white oak trimmed with gold. They are intricately carved with various niches, statues and spires. Corinthian pilasters support the arches framing each of the three altar areas.

The alterations to St. Mary's are relatively few, and for the most part, unobtrusive. In 1957 new pews and confessionals were installed, the painting on the ceiling removed, new organ installed, and new lighting system put in. At some point the oil paintings of the stations of the cross were removed as well as the carved pulpit. Air conditioning was installed and a shed erected over the basement door at the northeast corner at some unknown date.

St. Mary's Church is in excellent condition on the exterior and good condition on the interior. Since the church is presently not in use the stained glass windows have been boarded up to protect them from vandalism. Although vacant, the building is still being maintained.

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It was used for church services until the church was completed 12 years later. The church was finally dedicated on June 21, 1903, with what the Kansas City Journal called "the most impressive service held on any like occasion in the city's history."

The dedication was almost postponed due to the delay of two freight cars carrying the three altars. The cars were coming from Louisville, Kentucky, when the 1903 flood hit Kansas City. The cars were lost for two weeks and were finally located in Randolph, Missouri. The altars finally reached the church Saturday morning, the morning before the dedication. Twenty-five men began to install the altars at noon Saturday and by midnight the altars were in place. Newspaper articles of the day considered this to be one of the greatest feats ever performed in a Catholic Church in Kansas, and maybe in the United States.

St. Mary's played a major role in the religious and community history of Kansas City, Kansas. Fourteen other parishes were carved from the original territory of St. Mary's. At the 1903 dedication ceremonies of the church, Father Kuhls was credited with having "founded many churches and institutions, including St. Margaret's Hospital," and was praised for having "done more for the upbuilding and general good of Kansas City, Kansas, than any other man."

The importance of St. Mary's is suggested architecturally through monumentality of the Romanesque Revival Style in which it is built. Characteristic of that style are the semicircular arches over nearly all doors and windows, and the two towers of varied heights flanking the facade. The church is clearly a landmark in the community that grew up around it.

St. Mary's long and distinguished career was brought to an end on July 12, 1980, when the last mass was held. The Archbishop cited aging population, decreasing Catholic population, shortage of priests, financial burden, and duplication of church services as official reasons for closing St. Mary's and combining that parish with St. Anthony's.

THIS STATEMENT REFLECTS CURRENT KNOWLEDGE AND IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1890-1903 Builder/Architect Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

St. Mary's Church of Kansas City, Kansas, is the mother church of the Roman Catholic churches in Wyandotte county. The frontier parish was established in 1858 and grew in size and importance. The present church structure was started in 1890. Built entirely of stone, it is a fine example of the Romanesque Revival style. St. Mary's and three other Catholic churches (St. John The Baptist, Holy Family, and St. Anthony's) established from her original territory served as pivotal points for activities in the surrounding neighborhood known as Strawberry Hill. Strawberry Hill occupies a slope of the river bluff in the extreme east-central portion of the city.

St. Mary's Parish was established in the wilderness, among Indians, by Father Theodore Heinman in 1858, bringing Catholicism to Wyandotte county for the first time. Father William Fish replaced Father Heinman later that year and built a small brick church (20' x 40') at the corner of Ninth Street and Ann Avenue. It was then called St. Mary's Mission and had a congregation of seven families. In October 1864 Father Kuhls was sent to the parish and finally succeeded in establishing St. Mary's Church. He remained at St. Mary's for 44 years.

In 1865 Father Kuhls decided to move the church closer to town. To that end he bought three acres of land from Mathias Splitlog, a wealthy Indian, at the south-west corner of Fifth Street and Ann Avenue. In September of 1866 the new church was dedicated.

By 1890 five national and several local meat packing companies were operating plants in the west bottoms, a broad flat plain at the confluence of the Kaw and Missouri Rivers. Immigrants from Ireland, Germany, and Sweden followed by others from the Balkan countries, Poland, and Russia flocked to the area to work in the plants. These immigrants, most of them Catholic, made up the population of Strawberry Hill. Although the percentage of people with strong ethnic identity has been dropping, they still comprise somewhat over half of the neighborhood population. The publication Strawberry Hill: A Neighborhood Study noted that the churches of the area "provided for a variety of spiritual and temporal needs among the parishioners, and organized activities were initiated to meet these needs as the situation arose. . ." Three of the four churches on Strawberry Hill are still open and function yet as nuclei for community life in the ethnic neighborhood.

The construction of the present St. Mary's was begun in 1890. This time a church, rectory, and school were all part of the new building campaign. The basement of the church was begun in May, 1890, and dedicated on October 12, 1890.

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"A New Catholic Church St. Mary's, in Kansas City, KS., to be Dedicated Today."
Kansas City Star, June 21, 1903, p. 2.

"A Notable Golden Jubilee." Kansas City Kansas Catholic Register, October 9, 1908.

City of Kansas City, Kansas. Community Development Department. Strawberry Hill: A Neighborhood Study. Brennan Printing Co., 1978.

"Cornerstone is Laid." Kansas City Journal, May 7, 1900, p3.

"Dedication of St. Mary's." Kansas City Times, June 22, 1903, p4.

Kuhls, Reverend A. A Few Reminiscences of Forty Years in Wyandotte County, Kansas.
May 1, 1904.

Original Nomination submitted by Linda F. Becker, 816 Gleed Terrace, Kansas
City, Missouri.

9. Major Bibliographical References

(see continuation sheet)

10. Geographical Data

Acres of nominated property approx. 1/2 acre

Quadrangle name Kansas City

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

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4	3	3	10	4	5	10
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Zone Easting Northing

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Zone Easting Northing

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Verbal boundary description and justification Lots 40-48 inclusive, Block B6, Mieges Addition to Wyandotte City, now in and a part of Kansas City, Kansas. Lots on which church rests.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state N/A code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Nora Pat Small, Architectural Historian, Historic Preservation Department

organization Ks. State Historical Society date 3-30-82

street & number 120 West Tenth telephone 913 296-3251

city or town Topeka state Kansas 66612

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☐ state ☒ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Executive Director, State Historic Preservation Officer

date March 29, 1982

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

ST. JOSEPH
3.1 MI. TO

St. Mary's Church, Kansas City, Kansas
Wyandotte Co.
UTM Reference: 15/359790/4330450

